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A Lesson on the Twentieth Century

Miller Williams

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A Lesson on the Twentieth Century

by Miller Williams

They rode around in auto-mobiles,
metal sitting rooms that sat on wheels
and coursed a network of concrete
laid down by labor, a grid of street across street
inside the cities, and on the countryside
long winding ribbons sometimes laid so wide
eight of the units could run along together,
half going one direction and half the other.
The engines that powered them were built to burn
the residue of ancient life. You'll learn
now if you will activate your screens
how the drivers of these ingenious machines
could shift the ratios of their mechanical gears.
A lot of things have altered over the years
since nations went to war for gods and lands
and things lived in the oceans and there were bands
of people who used their own breath and hands
to make their music. All this was long before
we freed ourselves from fretting about chance
and learned not to walk too close to the shore
or think about things like dolphins anymore.

